DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 376 CS 006 329

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TITLE Sex Stereotyping in Mexican Reading Primers.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (26th, New Orleans, LA, April 27-May 1, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Careers; *Characterization; Content Analysis; Elementary Education; Females; Foreign Countries; Instructional Materials; Males; *Reading Materials; *Sex Bias; Sex Role; *Sex Stereotypes; Textbook Content; *Textbook Research
IDENTIFIERS *Mexico

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted comparing the sex stereotypes present in selected Mexican reading primers published in 1960 with those present in primers published in 1972 to determine whether any significant changes in sex stereotyping were reflected in the 1972 primers. Comparisons were made between four primers published in 1960 for grades one through four and four published in 1972 for the same grades. Examined were (1) the total number of male and female characters, (2) the major characters, (3) the careers of the characters, and (4) the traditional male and female roles. The results showed that there were significantly more male than female characters in both the 1960 and the 1972 primers, but that the ratio of male major characters to female major characters was somewhat more balanced in 1972. However, when the total number of female characters was considered, the career data showed that females were underrepresented in careers to a significantly greater degree in 1972 than in 1960. When the total number of characters in 1972 was considered, the data related to the traditional male and female roles showed that there were proportionally more instances of traditional sex role reinforcements in 1972 than in 1960. The study concluded that primers from both years presented Mexican children with a distorted reality in terms of population, career opportunities and sex roles. (HTH)

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ED208376

SEX STEREOTYPING IN MEXICAN READING PRIMERS

Presented at the
Twenty-sixth Annual Conference
of the
International Reading Association
New Orleans, Louisiana
April 1981

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SEX STEREOTYPING IN MEXICAN READING PRIMERS

What are Mexican girls and boys told about themselves through the official textbooks of the Mexican Ministry of Education? This question is extremely important to educators in the southwestern United States where the schools are filled with Mexican children. In order to answer the question, an instrument was developed and applied to a random sampling of stories and poems from eight Mexican reading primers.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an awareness of how sex stereotypes are perpetuated through instructional materials, to present the methodology used and the results obtained in an investigation of eight Mexican reading primers, and to provide information on what Mexican children read about themselves in the official curriculum materials of the Mexican government.

Perpetuation of Sex Stereotypes Through Instructional Materials

Before we can discuss what Mexican children read about themselves in these materials, it is necessary to reach an understanding of what characterizes sex stereotyping in textbooks. Considerable research on this subject has been done in the United States and some has been done cross-culturally. A representative sampling of the U.S. studies and one cross-

cultural study will be described. First, however, it is necessary to define the concept of sex role stereotyping.

Gordon Allport defined a stereotype as an "exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify our conduct in relation to that category." (1:187). Allport explained that stereotyping is part of a complex mental process which also involves categorization, cognitive organization, and linguistic labeling. For the purposes of this paper, sex role stereotyping is being defined as fixed ideas about the roles males and females are expected to play in a society.

U. S. studies. One of the first studies which analyzed the content of elementary readers in the United States was done by Child, Potter, and Levine (5:47), in 1946. Using the major theme of each story as an indicator, they discovered distinct patterns of sex role stereotyping. The results showed a predominance of males over females as central characters by 73% to 27%. The researchers suggested that if boys identify with male characters and girls with female characters, the readers must have profound effects on the development of personality in the two sexes.

Child's results showed that while the males were portrayed as the bearers of wisdom and knowledge, the females were shown as sociable, kind, and timid, but inactive, unambitious, and uncreative. In summarizing her results, Child

pointed out that the most striking fact of all is that female characters are simply neglected.

Key (11:168) explained that, in the late 1960s, numerous studies on the content of children's books sprung up spontaneously across the U. S. from student, mother, writer, professor, administrator, teacher, and librarian. Furthermore, these studies overwhelmingly document discrimination and prejudice against females in children's books.

Stefflre (13:99) examined the status of women as workers in the basic texts of several major publishers in the United States. Her results pointed to a distorted view of reality in that almost all of the adult male characters, but very few of the adult females, were employed. Therefore, the argument that children's readers simply reflect the norms of a given society is not necessarily true.

U'Ren (14:56), in a study recommended by the California State Board of Education, found that 75% of the main characters were male.

Karen DeCrow (6:44) determined that the fifteen major textbook companies in the United States control about 90% of the textbook market and that these companies produce very similar products. In general, they portray the female as helpmate, mother, and observer of male activities. Since school attendance is compulsory, every young girl must, by law, read about herself as a passive citizen for twelve years.

DeCrow also found that no man was shown as doing anything except going to work outside the home as a full-time

occupation. None of the men were students, unemployed, or did housework, except "men's work" such as gardening and taking out the garbage. The decision making for the family, however, was done by men.

On the basis of thorough investigations, Gwyneth Britton (4:143) delineated the characteristic stereotype models for boys, girls, men, and women exemplified in current United States reading series. She indicated that boys are consistently stereotyped as daring, intelligent, ingenious problem-solvers. They are doers, achievers, builders, and sports-people in the stories. Furthermore, they are heroic, persevering, and aggressive; they express positive qualities to be admired by their parents, teachers, peers, and siblings. Boys are usually shown as older and larger than their female peers, and they are portrayed as stoic, emotionless people who do not outwardly express any human sensitivity.

Girls, in contrast, are shown as spectators of life; they are usually docile, pleasing, self-effacing, incompetent, inept, and passive. They are constantly shown admiring boys while standing by passively, or portraying their sex-typed role of the domestic by ironing, baking and serving cookies, playing house, and helping mother in the kitchen. Girls do not initiate action, solve problems, build, create, or persevere. Instead, they appear as vacuous, non-achieving, unthinking observers who are always subordinate to males. Their appearance is invariably in character with the stereotype of the female--clean, neat, and femininely dressed.

Britton indicated that the men in the stories are cast as professional businessmen, problem solvers, and fathers who come up with all the exciting ideas for family trips or unique adventures. They are builders, doers, thinkers, and scholars who are intelligent, authoritarian, and in command of every situation.

The women are cast as pleasant, hard-working mothers whose domestic tasks of cooking, housekeeping, washing dishes, ironing, sweeping, mending, and baking bread are repeated continuously. They are uninteresting, unthinking, awkward, and unable to solve problems by themselves.

In terms of career roles, Britton pointed out that the quality as well as the quantity of career choices obviously favor the male characters. The female career role assignments are fewer in number and limited in both variety and quality.

Pottker (12:122) performed a study to determine how girls and women are presented in elementary school readers. She found that women's personalities and occupations are distorted in the texts. The women and girls in the stories are representative of the "most feminine" possible, and they are most frequently shown in the occupations of housewife and elementary school teacher. Pottker called for a more representative and less class-biased array of women's jobs and personality characteristics. Lastly, she suggested that further research be conducted to determine the harm sex and class stereotypes inflict on children.

Along the same lines, Bruno Bettleheim (2:377) described textbooks as "anxiety producing agents for children that contribute to a negative self-image." He explained that children compare themselves to the characters in the texts and realize that they are not like them. For example, some children cannot imagine themselves as passive homemakers, and others may realize that they may never be able to go to college and become teachers.

Graebner (8:52) analyzed 554 stories from two major publishers to determine whether the role of women had changed in U. S. elementary texts over the past ten years. She concluded that the texts had not kept pace with a changing society in that almost no change in the portrayal of the role of women had occurred.

Cross-cultural study. Only one cross-cultural study of the sex roles in elementary reading materials could be found. Denmark and Waters (7:192) hypothesized that (1) regardless of economic and political orientation, all societies studied will engage in the portrayal of sex role stereotypes, and (2) the sex role stereotyping depicted in the readers may differ across societies.

In order to study the cultural differences in the portrayal of sex roles in basic readers, the first grade text of the following five countries were analyzed: France, Rumania, Russia, Spain, and Sweden. The researchers used the method originated by Jacklin et. al. in 1973 as a guide.

They analyzed the content of the stories for the appearance of males and females as central or peripheral characters, the age group (adult or child), and whether the male and female characters portrayed a traditional or non-traditional sex role by the standards of each country.

The most easily comparable category involved the sex of the leading characters in the readers. The readers of all the countries except Sweden had more male characters than female. Taken over all the groups, the difference was significant. Throughout the Spanish books, there were no females who exhibited problem-solving behavior, not even those in the maternal role.

The final results showed that despite some differences in the presentation of men and women in society, all countries subscribed to the traditional sex role stereotypes through their basal readers.

In her examination of four children's books from the People's Republic of China, Howe (10:33) discovered that the books offer some helpful models for the U. S. textbook writers. Women are seen as doctors, lawyers, and factory workers, and in one book, there are actually more pictures of girls than of boys.

Summary. It has been found that sex stereotypes are perpetuated through children's textbooks, and that cross-national differences and similarities can be determined and presented in descriptive terms. Considerable research has been done

on the sex role stereotyping present in reading textbooks used in the United States. The investigations have shown that boys are much more likely to be shown as the achievers and problem-solvers in the stories, and girls are much more likely to be shown as the passive spectators.

INVESTIGATION OF MEXICAN READING PRIMERS: METHODOLOGY USED AND RESULTS OBTAINED

In contrast to the numerous studies of sex stereotyping in U. S. reading textbooks, no research on the sex roles presented in Mexican reading primers could be found. Since the Mexican Ministry of Education publishes and makes available a reading primer, at no cost, to every primary school child in Mexico, these books have a large impact on the society. It was decided, therefore, that an investigation of the sex stereotyping in these Mexican primers would have wide implications and be of value to educators in both Mexico and the United States.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to compare the sex stereotypes present in selected Mexican reading primers published in 1960 with those present in the primers published in 1972, and to determine whether any significant changes in sex stereotyping were reflected in the 1972 primers.

The analytical survey method was used in this comparative study, and the comparisons were made by means of four hypotheses regarding (1) the absolute numbers of male and

female characters, (2) the major characters, (3) the careers, and (4) the traditional male and female roles.

In order to make these comparisons, an instrument consisting of two parts was used. The first part involved the major characters and careers presented in the stories and poems. This portion of the instrument was developed by Gwyneth Britton (3) and had been field tested in the United States on over twenty thousand stories. Britton's instrument was selected because it considers both major characters and careers and because of its extensive field testing.

The second part of the instrument was designed by this writer to determine whether the traditional male and female roles of the Mexican culture were reinforced in the primers. It was necessary to develop such an instrument because no other with the same purpose was available. The roles included in the instrument were based on a thorough review of the literature on the subject and a face validity check by forty people.

The instrument was applied by three individuals to two sets of Mexican reading primers: those published in 1960 for grades one, two, three, and four, and those published in 1972 for the same grades. A total, therefore, of eight primers were evaluated for sex stereotyping. This was done by means of applying the instrument to a sampling of twenty stories and poems from each of the primers. In all, 160 stories and poems were evaluated. Each person evaluated the selections independently, and after the resolution of

any differences, one set of data was analyzed. Appropriate tests of statistical significance were applied.

Results Obtained

Absolute numbers of male and female characters. When the chi-square test was applied to the absolute numbers of male and female characters, it was determined that there were significantly more males than females in both the 1960 and the 1972 primers.

Table 1 shows the total number of male and female characters displayed by year.

TABLE 1

TOTAL NUMBER OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS DISPLAYED BY YEAR

Year	Sex		Total	df	X^2
	Male	Female			
1960	424 73%	160 27%	584	1	118.44*
1972	204 72%	79 28%	283	1	54.33*

*Significant at the .05 level.

Major characters. The data related to the major characters showed that, even when the smaller absolute numbers of females were taken into account, there were significantly more male major characters than female major characters in 1960, but not in 1972.

Table 2 shows the proportions of male and female major characters to the total number of male and female characters.

TABLE 2

PROPORTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE MAJOR CHARACTERS TO TOTAL NUMBERS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS, BY YEAR

Year		Male	Female	df	Z
1960	Proportion of major characters to total number of characters	.08	.04		
	Total number of characters	428	160	1	2.89*
1972	Proportion of major characters to total number of characters	.09	.11		
	Total number of characters	204	79	1	.79

*Significant at the .05 level.

Careers. The career data showed that when the smaller absolute numbers of female characters were considered, females were under-represented in careers to a significantly greater degree in 1972 than in 1960.

Table 3 shows the proportions of male and female characters in careers to the total numbers of male and female characters.

TABLE 3

PROPORTIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS IN CAREERS TO THE TOTAL NUMBERS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS, BY YEAR

Year		Male	Female	df	Z
1960	Proportion of characters in careers to total number of adult characters	.93	.89		
	Total number of adult characters	280	88	1	1.90
1972	Proportion of characters in careers to total number of adult characters	.89	.46		
	Total number of adult characters	132	41	1	9.61*

*Significant at the .05 level.

Traditional Male and Female Roles

The data related to the traditional male and female roles showed that there were considerably more traditional role reinforcements in 1960 than in 1972. Table 4 shows the frequency counts of traditional role reinforcements by sex and year.

TABLE 4

FREQUENCY COUNTS OF TRADITIONAL ROLE REINFORCEMENTS BY SEX AND YEAR

Year	Male	Female	Total
1960	408	105	513
1972	189	40	229

However, when the smaller total number of characters in 1972 was considered, it was found that there were proportionately more instances of traditional role reinforcements in 1972 than in 1960. Table 5 shows the proportion of role reinforcements to the total number of characters.

TABLE 5

PROPORTION OF TRADITIONAL ROLE REINFORCEMENTS TO TOTAL NUMBER OF CHARACTERS, BY YEAR

Year			df	Z
1960	Proportion of role reinforcements to the total number of characters	.88		
	Total number of characters	582		
1972	Proportion of role reinforcements to the total number of characters	.97		
	Total number of characters	236	1	7.01*

*Significant at the .05 level.

When the chi-square test was applied to the traditional role reinforcements versus role exceptions, it was discovered that there were significantly more instances of the male and female role reinforcements than there were role exceptions in both sets of primers. Table 6 shows the traditional role reinforcements versus role exceptions by year.

TABLE 6

TRADITIONAL ROLE REINFORCEMENTS VERSUS ROLE EXCEPTIONS BY YEAR

Year	Roles	Role Exceptions	df	X^2
1960	513 80%	126 20%	1	233.17*
1972	229 77%	69 23%	1	84.83*

*Significant at the .05 level.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn in connection with the study. In both the 1960 and 1972 reading primers, more than two-thirds of all the characters were male and less than one-third were female; it was concluded, therefore, that both editions presented a distorted view of reality to the Mexican children who read them.

Also, positive change toward less sex stereotyping in 1972 was made in only one of the areas studied--that of the major characters. In the other areas studied, there was either no change in the degree of sex stereotyping or changes were made toward increased sex stereotyping.

Furthermore, even though there has been a general and consistent trend in Mexico toward egalitarianism among males and females, especially in the urban areas, this trend was not reflected in the more recently published primers.

Finally, it can be concluded that the Mexican Ministry of Education did not use the reading primers it

published as agents of change to promote the concept of sexual equality.

WHAT MEXICAN CHILDREN READ ABOUT THEMSELVES

The Mexican children who read the 1960 and 1972 primers were presented with a distorted view of reality in terms of the Mexican population. They were told that more than two-thirds of the population is male and less than one-third is female. The implications of this unrealistic picture for both boys and girls are that being female is tantamount to being a minority and that boys and men are much more worth writing about than are girls and women (9:107).

In terms of the major characters, the Mexican children were almost three times more likely to read about a male major character than they were a female major character. In the 1960 and 1972 books combined, there were forty-seven (47) male major characters and only sixteen (16) female major characters (9:81).

The following list shows the career categories, by sex, for the 1960 and 1972 primers combined (9:138). The Mexican children saw a much wider range of career options for males than for females. Because there were seventy-three (73) male career categories and only eighteen (18) female career categories, the message to Mexican children was that males have a much greater chance of entering an interesting career than do females.

CAREER CATEGORIES BY SEX, 1960 and 1972

MALE CAREERS:

1. air traffic controller
2. army official
3. artist
4. astronaut
5. bookkeeper
6. boss--coal team
7. brick layer
8. cadet
9. carpenter
10. circus owner
11. clerk
12. clown
13. coal manufacturer
14. conductor
15. conqueror
16. copier
17. cotton picker
18. doctor
19. driver of luggage vehicle
20. emperor
21. factory worker
22. farmer
23. farm worker
24. father
25. fireman
26. fisherman
27. garbageman
28. gardener
29. hunter
30. immigration official
31. interior decorator
32. inventor
33. jeweler
34. king
35. laborer
36. lamp lighter
37. loader
38. magician
39. mailman
40. mechanic
41. merchant
42. military man
43. milkman
44. miller
45. mover
46. museum guide
47. musician
48. navigator
49. painter
50. philosopher
51. pilot
52. pirate
53. poet
54. president
55. priest
56. prince
57. principal
58. printer
59. robber
60. roofer
61. sailor
62. scientist
63. ship captain
64. soldier
65. stockman
66. store owner
67. sugar cane cutter
68. supermarket manager
69. teacher
70. thief
71. warrior
72. water carrier
73. writer

FEMALE CAREERS

1. cashier
2. coal manufacturer
3. farmer's wife
4. fruit vendor
5. gypsy
6. janitor
7. maid
8. majorette
9. mother
10. musician
11. painter
12. princess
13. queen
14. secretary
15. teacher
16. typist
17. vegetable vendor
18. wife

As delineated by Heathcote (9:140), the traditional male and female roles of the Mexican culture are as follows:

TRADITIONAL MALE ROLES

1. Provides warmth and support for young children (under 12)
2. Makes decisions for the family on areas outside the home
3. Possesses worldly knowledge (includes solving problems with logic)
4. Provides economic security for the family
5. Does household chores--outside the house or repairs
6. Shows fortitude under adversity
7. Protects safety, honor, and/or prestige of self and family
8. Shows physical strength
9. Is cast as a National Hero/Leader or Inventor
10. Has long, committing friendships/companionships
11. Shows pride (in race, country, state, city, self)
12. Is an authority figure (gives directions, orders, or commands)
13. Boy is involved in manly activities
14. Boy is in an active role (includes work, study, and leisure)

Of the above male roles, the five which appeared the most frequently in the Mexican reading primers were as follows (9:140):

1. Boy is in an active role (149 instances)
2. Possesses worldly knowledge (89 instances)
3. Shows physical strength (35 instances)
4. Is an authority figure (34 instances)
5. Boy is involved in manly activities (29 instances)

TRADITIONAL FEMALE ROLES

1. Provides warmth, support, and understanding for family members
2. Is a socializer and model for her children
3. Is a silent and persevering reflection of her husband's will
4. Makes decisions within the home
5. Does household chores
6. Shows emotion (expresses joy, sadness, fear, sympathy, etc.)
7. Shows concern for personal hygiene, manners, and health of family members
8. Is reserved outside the home and/or in social situations
9. Mother is adored and/or praised (reverence)
10. Seeks and/or accepts advice or support from husband when she cannot solve a problem
11. Subordinates her wants and needs to those of husband and children (denies herself something for them)
12. Girl is an aide for elders, parents, and siblings
13. Girl assists mother with household chores
14. Girl observes boy(s) in action (passive in work or play situations)

Of the above female roles, the five which appeared the most frequently in the Mexican reading primers were as follows (9:142):

1. Does household chores (40 instances)
2. Shows emotion (33 instances)
3. Provides warmth, support, and understanding for family members (22 instances)
4. Girl is an aide for elders, parents, and siblings (9 instances)

5. Girl observes boy(s) in action (8 instances)

As can be seen from the above results, Mexican children read about males as active, intelligent, strong, authority figures who are likely to be involved in manly activities. On the other hand, they read about females as suited for housework, emotional, providers of warmth and support, aides for elders, and as observers of active males.

It should also be explained that the 1960 books had many stories about the traditional family unit in which the father goes off to work in the morning and the mother is seen wearing an apron or taking care of the children. Furthermore, most of these stories were told through the eyes of the son. This type of story was not found in the 1972 primers. Thus, it appeared that a shift took place from overt sexism in 1960 to a more covert form of sexism in 1972.

Summary

The discrimination and imbalances evident in the Mexican reading primers were probably unintentional, but that does not alleviate the destructiveness that might occur among the children who read them. Stereotypes can and do get in the way of the individual's social and intellectual development.

It might be that the Mexican textbook writers were too eager to offer children what they considered to be an idealized world. In doing so, however, they tended to confuse what was ideal with what was readily apparent. The

results of this research made it clear that these writers failed to present to children a realistic picture of the Mexican society. Rather than promoting sexual equality through the reading primers, it appears that the Mexican Ministry of Education used the books to safeguard the traditional sex roles of the culture.

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